

Seven Secrets of the World's (and MaP's!) Best Students

What are the secrets of the world's top-performing students? What's the difference between ordinary students and extraordinary students? Here's how any student, and especially Maru-a-Pula students, can go from average to amazing in seven simple, but challenging, steps.

1. Discipline Yourself: Ordinary students are rusty wheelbarrows: they only move when pushed. They roll along with squeals and moans. Exceptional students are bicycles. They propel themselves. They don't wait for someone to get them rolling; they're self-starters and, as a result, they go much farther.

Self discipline is about making a sacrifice. Sometimes it means putting off *what you really like doing*: hanging out with friends when there's work to be done, watching TV, going on Instagram, WhatsApp or Facebook. What pleasure or pastime, would *you* need to sacrifice to excel?

Ordinary students put off the toughest jobs till later in the day. Amazing students do the most difficult assignments first, when they're fresh. Extraordinary students constantly remind themselves of what they want. They write down their goals and post them -- "**I am getting an A in Maths**" -- in places where they'll see these goals every day. Self discipline is less difficult -- it's never easy -- when you have *your own* marching orders on daily display.

2. Manage Your Time: Extraordinary students get the same amount of time as ordinary students -- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week -- but they manage it better. Managing your time is like packing a suitcase. You write up a packing list and then you make sure the big items go in first, followed by the smaller items. It's no good trying to jam a big item into your suitcase if you loaded the small stuff first.

The best students jump at the chance to use small bits of time, small spaces in the suitcase. They know how often they have to wait for short periods of time: say it's 15 minutes waiting for a ride. Average students look down the road and tap their feet. Amazing students look in the book they're reading -- they carry a book at all times -- and tap their brain, not their feet.

3. Position Your Body: Extraordinary students put themselves near the front of the class, close to the teaching action. They sit up and listen intently to whomever is speaking. Extraordinary students nod their heads to indicate they understand; they track the speaker with their eyes, be it teacher or student.

Ordinary students focus more on socializing than learning. They sit with friends or near the back of the class to avoid the teacher. Ordinary students slouch in their seats; extraordinary students sit upright in a chair. They don't slump; they don't recline. If they lie down it's to sleep or nap but not to study.



Andrew Taylor, Principal

6. Ask Questions: Ordinary students are embarrassed to raise their hand and ask a question. For them, it's easier to be silent and confused rather than to risk being active and clear.

As the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says, "If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable about asking questions and then ask anyway."

Ask your fellow students questions, especially if they're doing better than you are. As US Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor, explains: "I did something very unusual for a child... I decided to approach one of the smartest girls in the class and ask her how to study. Donna Renella looked surprised, maybe even flattered. In any case, she generously divulged her technique... the critical lesson I learned that day is still one too many kids never figure out: don't be shy about making a teacher of any willing party who knows what he or she is doing."

5. Find a Mentor: A mentor is a coach, an experienced person who advises a younger person. Wherever you go, someone has travelled that way before, someone who can help you avoid potholes in the road. Extraordinary students often find a teacher to act as a mentor but it can also be an older student, relative or family friend. They choose a mentor who inspires them, a person they feel comfortable with, someone they can talk to regularly.

Ordinary students regard teachers and older students as nuisances to be endured, not human resources to be tapped. Ordinary students cannot say the four magic words that extraordinary students say: "I need your help."

6. Read, Read, Read: What would you do if you weren't allowed to read? During his 27 years in prison, a dedicated reader, Nelson Mandela, struggled to overcome his warders' determination to cut off any news of the outside world. As he noted in *Long Walk To Freedom*, "Newspapers are more valuable to political prisoners than gold or diamonds, more hungered for than food or tobacco."

One secret benefit of the long hours spent chipping limestone rocks in Robben Island's notorious quarry was that the guards ate sandwiches that were wrapped in forbidden newspapers. While prisoners distracted them, the guards' discarded papers were plucked from bins and stashed in shirts for later reading.

Little wonder then that Mandela loved reading. As he recalled: "This joy is one that I have treasured all my life, and it is one I wish for all South Africans"

7. Work in a Team: Study alone and you'll only go so far, but not far enough. The power of one brain is limited. Teams of students – study groups -- keep each other on task; they stay motivated and encourage each other when the going gets tough.

Why should a top student bother joining a study group full of students who need help? Research shows that when you have to explain a difficult concept clearly, your own mastery of the material improves dramatically. Plus, the verbal back and forth of a dedicated group sticks in your mind much better than silent study.

A wise African proverb says: *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*

***So there you have the seven secrets of the world's best students – discipline yourself, manage your time, position your body, ask questions, find a mentor, read and work in a team.
Good luck and go far!***